



Spring 2018 – **Setting yourself up to thrive 2 –
Hearing God’s voice** (Paul Langham)
the 10 & the 5: 14 January

Reading: see below ...

RE-CAP on ‘The Year of Growth’ teaching series

You can find resources at: https://www.ccweb.org.uk/Groups/299249/Year_of_Growth.aspx

You can listen to Chris’s talk at the 10 last week (7 January) here:

<https://www.ccweb.org.uk/Media/AllMedia.aspx>

Unfortunately, Andrew’s talk at the 5 last week (7 January) was not recorded, but you can watch his recap here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U-IPypQXTVY>

You can find a pdf with Questions here: <https://cdn.filestackcontent.com/K0cADTPIRdKCcl7ym84A>

Last week – Chris taught some really important truths

- God wants us to thrive
- That happens as we follow Jesus (union, walking down the same road: lifetime)
- Thriving is firstly a matter of internal reality which then finds external expression
- John 10 – habits and hearing
- ‘I have come to give life in all its fullness’: Jesus’ words express the heart of God for all of us

INTRODUCTION

Being married is like having somebody permanently in your corner. It feels limitless, not limited. Gloria Steinem

Ultimately the bond of all companionship, whether in marriage or in friendship, is conversation. Oscar Wilde

Theologians, evangelists and preachers often remind us that Christianity is not so much a religion as a relationship. God exists in perfect relationship between three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Human beings are made in his image – in part that means we are made for relationship, with other human beings ... and with him.

We all exist in relationship to other people – and we’re probably all aware that the lifeblood of any relationship is communication ...

Any long-term relationship can be improved (in communication and other areas) by attending the Marriage Course (it’s not just for marrieds and certainly not just for those who are struggling – even excellent relationships can be strengthened and improved!)

Details: <https://ccweb.churchsuite.co.uk/events/vv6b4fzp>

God invites all of us into relationship with him – and he longs to communicate with us.

In other words, hearing God’s voice should be the expectation, not the exception ...

Jesus said

27 My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. 28 I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand. (John 10)

In the Near East, you can still see shepherds leading their flocks – walking ahead and constantly speaking to them. The sheep are reassured by their shepherd’s voice – they know he will lead them on safe paths to clean water and good grazing.

It’s the same with Jesus – he walks with us and speaks constantly. As we learn to recognise his voice, we grow in confidence to follow him, knowing he will lead us on safe paths to the living water of his Holy Spirit and the good grazing of his Word.

Even when he has to correct us, it’s always done for our thriving – if we imagine God with a megaphone, his angry voice telling us we’ve taken a wrong turning and ‘Just you wait!’, we’ve got him totally wrong.

His voice is saying, ‘The path you’re on isn’t going to help you thrive, it’s going to lead you to hurt yourself and I don’t want you to get hurt. Here’s a better path – let’s walk it together ...’

A child who steps off the pavement into the road may experience some pain as she is yanked back by her mother. She may initially be frightened and even read anger in her mother’s face – yet that act of ‘discipline’ was born of love, and saved the child from the much greater pain (or worse) of being hit by a car. In today’s mixed up world, many people seem to believe that discipline is incompatible with love – even that it’s the opposite of love. In fact, discipline is a function of love. The opposite of love is neglect ...

So How does God Speak to us?

God’s voice, his word, comes to us in 2 distinct forms, according to the Bible

1. ‘logos’ – the written Word, scripture: God’s ‘always’ Word which speaks eternal and unchanging truth to every human life
2. ‘rhema’ – God’s ‘now’ word (which can never stand in contradiction to the ‘always’ Word) which speaks specific truth to individuals

A personal example – when I became a Christian at the age of 14 and started to read the Bible seriously, I soon discovered that marriage is something God encourages.

But it was just over 10 years later, on 7 October 1984, on my first Sunday in Cambridge as an ordinand, as I sat in my first service at St Barnabas church, that God drew my attention to the woman I now know to be Jackie, and said, ‘That’s the woman you’re going to marry.’

God’s ‘rhema’ word chimed perfectly with his ‘logos’ Word to bring me specific guidance ...

Now, it doesn’t matter whether you ‘hear’ God in the same way I do. We’re all different and we will hear the Lord’s voice in different ways. It is likely that we will each have one or two ways in which we most commonly hear him speak. At the end of these notes, you’ll find a 2 sided sheet which lists some of the more common ways in which God speaks to his people. It’s not exhaustive, but it’s a helpful starting place.

Basic Principles

- God is a good Father who loves us unconditionally – like any loving Father, he loves to speak to his children
- God wants us to thrive and his speaking is ALWAYS designed to that end – even if he speaks to correct us, his voice will not leave us condemned under the weight of sin and shame (if we experience that, it’s almost certainly the voice of our Enemy), but free to step out from under the shadow of sin and shame

God's voice in scripture

The pre-eminent way in which God speaks to his people is through his logos, his written Word, the bible. We believe it is literally 'God-breathed' and an infallible guide by which to live (2 Timothy 3:16).

Theology means the study of God's Word (theo logos).
You can be a theologian without being a Christian.

But you can't be a Christian without being a theologian ...

How did you take that last statement? Some might read it and think, 'I'm no theologian, so Paul's just told me I'm not a Christian ...' Quite the opposite, I'm saying that, if you're a Christian (even if recently converted), you ARE a theologian.

If you're a Christian, that makes you a theologian – whatever you think of yourself, you are someone seeking to study God's Word. You will bring to each passage some previous experience, a memory, perhaps, of some teaching you've heard ... but what is fresh is what the Spirit of God says to you, just for you, on this particular occasion.

In fact, if you had only one verse of scripture, say for example the one quoted above ...

²⁷ My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand. (John 10)

... and it lived within you, bringing you assurance of eternal life and a growing awareness of the presence of Jesus, you would be a more successful theologian than some of the men and women I knew at Cambridge who could give you the epistemology (don't ask ...) of every word in the Book, who've spent their lives studying the pen portrait of Jesus it offers, but who've never realised he wants to step from the page into their hearts ...

So, one of the most significant things we can do to set ourselves up to thrive in 2018, is to engage afresh with God's Word, the bible.

We do that as we listen to good teaching, either here in church or online (make sure you know where it's coming from). God uses people like me to explain scripture to others – I'm forever grateful for and humbled by the calling he's given me for that. And I know that there are some things people won't 'get' unless someone like me explains them ...

... BUT (did you notice it's a big but?) there are also some things I will never 'get' because they are things the Lord wants to speak just to you, from his Word, through his Spirit.

So today we're going to practice something called Lectio Divina, a dynamic way of reading the Scriptures that's been around since at least 300 AD. Its 4 components are

- Reading
- Meditation
- Prayer
- Contemplation

Below you will find a passage of scripture. In the Gatherings, I will pray a simple prayer – that the Holy Spirit, the author of scripture, will breathe afresh on his Word, bringing it alive to us in new ways; and that our hearts & minds, again by his work within us, will receive fresh insight, encouragement, challenge and direction from it.

[If you're not present at the Gatherings, you can pray that prayer in a small group, with a prayer partner, or on your own, and then follow what we did on Sunday, as detailed below.]

We will read the passage quietly and slowly – pray again – and then read it over once more. On the third reading, invite the Holy Spirit to speak to you specifically – this may involve

- being reminded of a long-known truth: sometimes, the timing will be pertinent to something going on in life
- seeing something you've never noticed before – scripture is endlessly rich and can yield new truth on each reading
- the feeling that God is highlighting a particular phrase or even one word which speaks to a particular situation you are facing at the moment.

Underline words or phrases that speak to you – make notes as you read of anything you think the Lord might be highlighting or saying. Don't worry initially about understanding – just try to be attentive to what comes to mind. There's nothing wrong with 'practising' our spiritual disciplines – just as we would practise any skill we are learning in life – and therefore there's no problem with mistakes as we learn!

Matthew 14:13-21

¹³ When Jesus heard what had happened [*the execution of his cousin John the Baptist by King Herod*], he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place. Hearing of this, the crowds followed him on foot from the towns. ¹⁴ When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed those who were ill.

¹⁵ As evening approached, the disciples came to him and said, 'This is a remote place, and it's already getting late. Send the crowds away, so that they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food.'

¹⁶ Jesus replied, 'They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat.'

¹⁷ 'We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish,' they answered.

¹⁸ 'Bring them here to me,' he said. ¹⁹ And he told the people to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people. ²⁰ They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. ²¹ The number of those who ate was about five thousand men, besides women and children.

Questions as you read, pray and meditate through the passage above

1. What shines out to you?
2. Does this passage raise any questions?
3. Where do you see Jesus in this passage and what do you learn about him?
4. Personal application – what is the Lord saying to me in this passage?
5. Is there something I need to share with others?
6. Why is this in the Bible?

Paul Langham, January 2018
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HOW DO WE HEAR GOD SPEAK?

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How do we hear God speak?

The bible

e.g. a verse comes into your head; or as you are reading a text it speaks to your situation, as though God has highlighted the verse with a marker pen

The bible is our infallible guide to hearing God speak – all the other ways by which people hear the voice of God (including those listed below) must always be checked against his written word: God's NOW word can never contradict his ALWAYS Word.

Here are some of the other ways in which God speaks to people

1 Creation

For some people, God speaks as they spend time in the great outdoors

2 Environment

This can be a sound while you are praying, or something you can see with your physical sight

3 Prophetic Words

Very occasionally people hear an audible voice (e.g. as at the baptism of Jesus or the conversion of St Paul). But more commonly, these come by way of impression or a sense of what God is saying: may be a word of knowledge or wisdom. Often, the same impression will come several times in different contexts.

4 Pictures

seeing a picture in your mind or projected in front of you

In the Old Testament the lord often asks the prophets, 'What do you see?' and then explains the picture to them:

And the Lord asked me, 'What do you see, Amos?' 'A plumb-line,' I replied. Then the Lord said, 'Look, I am setting a plumb-line among my people Israel; I will spare them no longer.' (Amos 7:8)

Sometimes a visual impression may be related to healing e.g. a picture of a leg/elbow/kidney: that's what God wants to heal.

5 Visions

Like watching a moving picture – a series of events:

The vision concerning Judah and Jerusalem that Isaiah son of Amoz saw during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah. (Isaiah 1)

6 Dreams

similar to visions but whilst you are asleep

The Old Testament Joseph had prophetic dreams (Genesis 37)

The New Testament Joseph was visited by an angel in a dream (Matthew 1:20; 2:13, 19), as were the magi (Matthew 2:12)

7 Angelic / Demonic encounters

In the Old Testament Daniel has an encounter with an angel (Daniel 10)

Billy Graham's book – Angels, God's Secret Agents

8 Impressions / conscience

you just know – this must be tested

Immediately Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they were thinking in their heart (Mark 2:8)

9 Other mediums

TV, Film, advertising boards

10 Tongues

Individual: primarily for the believer to edify him / herself as a devotional gift. Can be used to pray when we don't know what to pray – can be the language of heaven (Glossalalia) or a language unknown to us (Xenolalia)

Corporate:

When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church. If anyone speaks in

a tongue, two – or at the most three – should speak, one at a time, and someone must interpret. If there is no interpreter, the speaker should keep quiet in the church and speak to himself and God. (1 Cor14: 27-28)

A Final word

We should be expectant to hear God speaking to us, and open to him doing so in many different ways
A wise friend once said: “I’m trying to never be offended by God however he chooses to speak!” – that’s good advice

It is likely that we will have one or two ways in which we most commonly hear him speak

Remember that any gift of the Spirit is a tool not a jewel: they are for the service of others, not the adornment of ourselves – prophecy in particular is a gift given to strengthen, encourage and comfort

*everyone who prophesies speaks to people for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort
(1 Corinthians 14:3)*